



THREE NUMBERS THAT RULE YOUR LIFE

The three most important numbers in your life aren't your usual lottery picks, Social Security number and birth date. Instead they're your:

- Cholesterol count
- Blood pressure
- Body mass index

#1 Cholesterol: You need to know more than your total number

It used to be your doctor could say, "Your cholesterol is 180. Keep up the good work," and then move on to another topic. But today your doctor looks at your entire lipid profile, which is a blood test done at your doctor's office after a nine- to 12-hour fast. The test measures fats in your blood including:

- **Total cholesterol** – the sum of your LDL and HDL numbers. Try to keep that sum below 200. However, it's the LDL and HDL numbers that are most important.
- **HDL cholesterol** – HDL is called good or "Healthy" cholesterol. The higher the better with this type of cholesterol: 50 or higher, if you're a woman, or 40 or higher, if you're a man. An HDL of 60 and above is considered protective against heart disease.
- **LDL cholesterol** – LDL is the bad or "Lousy" cholesterol. The lower your LDL cholesterol, the lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Optimal LDL is 100 or lower. However, if you have other major risk factors, like cardiovascular disease or diabetes, your doctor may want your LDL closer to 70.
- **Triglycerides** – the most common type of fat in your blood. While normal triglyceride levels vary by age and sex, aim for a level of less than 150.

#2 Blood pressure: What you need to know

High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of kidney and heart disease. The good news is it can be controlled. But first you have to know you have it.

Blood pressure is one of the easiest health tests you can get. You can take your blood pressure readings at health clubs, health fairs, many drug stores, and at every doctor's visit. Your blood pressure may vary during the day, rising when you get nervous or excited and dropping after exercise. However, it generally stays consistent. Blood pressure is given as two numbers such as 120/80. The top number tells the pressure of your blood against your arteries just after your heart beats. The bottom number is that pressure when your heart is at rest.

Here's how your doctor looks at your blood pressure reading:

- A "normal" blood pressure number is 120/80. Even lower than that is good as long as it's not too low. If your numbers are higher than 120/80, you need to make some lifestyle changes.

HUMANA
Guidance when you need it most

- Between 120/80 and 139/89 is thought of as “prehypertension.” It means you’re heading for high blood pressure unless you make some lifestyle changes. And if you have diabetes or kidney disease, 130/80 or higher is thought of as high blood pressure for you. In this case, it’s even more important to watch your blood pressure.
- If your numbers are 140/90 or higher, you have high blood pressure. Your heart has to work too hard and you’re at risk for stroke and heart attack. High blood pressure usually has no symptoms so it can silently hurt your heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of your body. Talk with your doctor about what you need to do to control your high blood pressure.

#3 Body Mass Index and weight – They work together

Your BMI, or body mass index, is a measure that can spot weight issues that may lead to health problems. You can find your BMI by using the BMI calculator at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi. Or, you can figure it out yourself.

- Multiply your weight in pounds by 703
- Multiply your height in inches by your height in inches
- Divide the first number by the second number to get your BMI

A BMI over 30 is considered obese, 26 to 29 is overweight, 25 to 18.5 is normal, and under 18.5 is underweight.

People with a BMI of 30 or higher are more likely to develop high blood pressure and have high cholesterol.

If you’re carrying too much fat around your waist, you’re setting yourself up for diabetes. A healthy waist measurement is less than 40 inches for a man and less than 35 inches for a woman.

Make your numbers better with these lifestyle changes:

Eat a low-salt, low-fat diet

For high blood pressure: Too much salt, which causes your body to hold in fluid, can raise your blood pressure and put a strain on your heart. So throw away your saltshaker and learn to read food labels. There’s a lot of salt (also called sodium) in canned foods, cheese, dried fruits and even some medicines.

For high cholesterol: Saturated fat and cholesterol can raise your blood cholesterol. So it’s important to reduce the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet.

Exercise

For high blood pressure: An inactive lifestyle makes it easy to gain weight and can make your blood pressure go up. If you’re overweight, one hour a day of exercise that raises your heart rate can lower your blood pressure.

For high cholesterol: Regular physical activity at least 30 minutes a day can help raise HDL (good) cholesterol and lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides, especially if you’re overweight and have a waist measurement that is larger than is healthy.

Stay at a healthy weight

For high blood pressure: People with a BMI of 30 or higher are more likely to get high blood pressure. A low-calorie diet can be helpful in losing weight or staying at a healthy weight.

For high cholesterol: If you’re overweight, losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, raise your HDL, and lower your triglycerides.

Don't smoke

For high blood pressure: Smoking raises blood pressure and increases your risk of heart disease. Smoking injures blood vessels and speeds up hardening of the arteries. Your risk of a heart attack drops quickly after you quit smoking.

For high cholesterol: Smoking increases a person's risk for high LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. It makes you more likely to get blood clots and hardening of the arteries. Even second-hand smoke can lower good HDL. Much of this damage can be reversed after a person quits smoking.

Take medicine if prescribed

Your doctor may prescribe a medicine that you need to take every day exactly as prescribed. Changing the dose or stopping the medicine without your doctor's OK is dangerous.

Control your stress

Too much stress is linked to high blood pressure.

Watch your alcohol

Regular and heavy use of alcohol can raise your blood pressure.

Don't take decongestants

Some cold and flu medicines that help clear up a stuffy nose can raise your blood pressure and affect other medicines.

Find out about the warning signs

Since every second counts in a heart attack or stroke, it's important to know the signs of both. Find out about the warning signs at the American Heart Association http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/General/911---Warnings-Signs-of-a-Heart-Attack_UCM_305346_SubHomePage.jsp

If you have any of them, call 911 right away.

Work with your doctor

Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked often by your doctor and do what your doctor says to get unhealthy levels down to a healthy level. See your doctor on a regular basis and follow his or her advice.

Sources:

National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Calculate Your Body Mass Index, National Cholesterol Education Program

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/chol/wyntk.pdf>

National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Calculate Your Body Mass Index

<http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi>

National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, What is High Blood Pressure?

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP_WhatIs.html

American Heart Association

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/General/911---Warnings-Signs-of-a-Heart-Attack_UCM_305346_SubHomePage.jsp